

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 1009

MILITARY COMMANDS FOR POLADS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR GR US

SUBJECT: CORFU DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST USS BYRD:

SOME OBSERVATIONS

REF: ATHENS 720 781 (NOTAL)

1. THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN CORFU ON JAN 27, WHICH
CAUSED THE ABRUPT TERMINATION OF THE PORT VISIT OF THE
USS BYRD, SHOULD BE ASSESSED AND INTERPRETED IN THREE
DIFFERENT AREAS. GREEK PUBLIC OPINION IS NEVER UNIFORM.
ALTHOUGH THE REACTIONS OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT, THE GREEK
MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION AND THE GREEK PUBLIC ARE ALWAYS
RELATED, THEY HAVE DIFFERENT CADENCES AND DIFFERENT
PERSPECTIVES. MERCURIAL AS GREEK PUBLIC OPINION SEEMS
TO BE, IT IS SLUGGISH COMPARED TO THAT OF THE PRESS

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AND INVARIABLY LESS DISCRIMINATING THAN THAT OF THE

GOVERNMENT. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CORFU INCIDENT CAN ONLY BE WEIGHED BY MEASURING ITS IMPACT IN ALL THREE AREAS.

2. AT THE SIMPLEST AND MOST OBVIOUS LEVEL, THE CORFU DEMONSTRATIONS REPRESENT A SETBACK AND A REMINDER. ALTHOUGH APPARENTLY ORGANIZED BY LEFT WING CORFIOT ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING THE COMMUNISTS AND PASOK, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE SLOGANS OF THE AGITATORS FOUND A RESONANCE IN THE ATTITUDES OF LESS DOCTRINAIRE SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, SHOPKEEPERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS SEEM TO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE PROTEST. THE POPULATION OF CORFU CITY NUMBERS ABOUT 30,000 AND PERHAPS 10,000 PEOPLE, DRAWN FROM THE TOWN AND OUTLYING AREAS, JOINED THE DEMONSTRATION EITHER ACTIVELY OR AS SYMPATHETIC SPECTATORS. FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE GREEK LEFT, THE PROTEST WAS A SUCCESS AND SETBACK TO THE US AND THE GREEK GOVERNMENT IN OUR JOINT EFFORTS TO RESTORE GREATER HARMONY IN US-GREEK RELATIONS. EVENTS IN CORFU WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY ENCOURAGE THE LEFT TO SEEK OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO EMBARRASS US. THE CORFU INCIDENT, THEREFORE, SHOULD SERVE AS A REMINDER THAT, DESPITE SOME OVERALL IMPROVEMENTS IN US-GREEK RELATIONS IN RECENT MONTHS, GREEK PUBLIC OPINION REMAINS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE PURITY OF OUR INTENTIONS AND POTENTIALLY MUTINOUS WHEN AROUSED.

3. BUT THE LESSON OF CORFU WOULD BE INCOMPLETE AND EVEN MISLEADING IF WE STOPPED THERE. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT, WHICH FINALLY APPROVED THE VISIT OF THE BYRD (THE FIRST USN PORT VISIT IN MORE THAN SIX MONTHS) WAS BOTH SURPRISED AND TO SOME EXTENT SHOCKED BY THE CORFIOT REACTION. CARAMANLIS HAS BEEN CONCERNED FOR SOME TIME ABOUT ANTI-AMERICANISM IN GREECE. HE HAS RECOGNIZED THAT THE EFFECTS OF ANTI-AMERICANISM ARE AS COSTLY AS THE POLITICAL EFFECTS ARE DANGEROUS. WHATEVER HIS DISAGREEMENT WITH AMERICAN POLICY DURING THE PERIOD OF GREEK MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND AT THE TIME OF THE CYPRUS CRISIS LAST SUMMER, THE PM IS AWARE OF THE EFFORTS OF THE US TO HELP GREECE AVOID

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A MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH TURKEY AND TO FIND AN ACCEPTABLE SETTLEMENT ON THE CYPRUS PROBLEM. HE IS EQUALLY AWARE THAT THE US CAN HELP PUT EFFECTIVE PRESSURE ON THE TURKS. CONSEQUENTLY, THE CORFU OUTBURST WAS AS UNWELCOME TO HIM AS IT WAS TO US. THE RESULT WAS A STATEMENT ISSUED AT THE PM'S INSTRUCTION BY HIS PRESS SPOKESMAN DEPLORING ANTI-AMERICAN DEMONSTRATIONS IN MORE EXPLICIT TERMS THAN

THE GREEK GOVT HAD BEEN WILLING TO USE BEFORE.
CORFU WAS THEREFORE A REMINDER OF A DIFFERENT KIND
TO CARAMANLIS, A REMINDER THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT
MUST MAKE A STRONGER EFFORT TO COUNTER ANTI-AMERICANISM
AND PREVENT PUBLIC OPINION, AT A RELATIVELY UNINFORMED
LEVEL, FROM IMPEDING THE IMPROVEMENT IN
GREEK-US RELATIONS WHICH CARAMANLIS NEEDS IF HIS
EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PROBLEMS ARE TO BE SOLVED.

4. ALSO OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE, OF COURSE,
IS THE GREEK PRESS, WHICH, WHATEVER
ITS POLITICAL COLORATION, CONTINUES TO BE MORBIDLY
SUSPICIOUS, SELF-ABSORBED AND VAINGLORIOUS. EVEN HERE, HOWEVER,
THERE HAS BEEN SOME IMPROVEMENT. NO ONE GETS A "GOOD
PRESS" IN GREECE. THE SHADES OF COMMENTARY RUN FROM BLACK
TO LIGHT GRAY. THE IMAGE OF THE US AT THE PRESENT TIME
APPROXIMATES CHARCOAL WHICH IS A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT
FROM LAST FALL. THE ATHENS PRESS COVERED THE
CORFU DEMONSTRATIONS WITH SOME RESTRAINT. OUR
OWN CONTACTS WITH THE EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS SUGGEST THAT
A MORE THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO GREEK-AMERICAN RELATIONS IS
BEGINNING TO BE ADOPTED BY THE SERIOUS PRESS AND
IF THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO ASSIST OUR OWN EFFORTS
BY WORKING HARDER ON THE PROBLEM, THIS FAVORABLE TREND
SHOULD CONTINUE.

5. TO SUMMARIZE THE CONCLUSIONS WE DRAW FROM THE CORFU
INCIDENT, WE BELIEVE (A) GREEK PUBLIC OPINION, AND
PARTICULARLY PROVINCIAL OPINION, STILL REGARDS US WITH
SUSPICION AND OUR POLICIES WITH DISTRUST, AND LAGS BEHIND
THE GOVT OR EVEN THE MORE ENLIGHTENED SEGMENTS OF
THE PRESS IN PERCEIVING THE IMPORTANCE TO GREECE OF
RESTORING CLOSE GREEK-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP; (B) THE
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SETBACK IN CORFU WILL, HOPEFULLY, ENCOURAGE THE GOVT
IN GENERAL AND CARAMANLIS IN PARTICULAR TO PLAY A MORE
ACTIVE ROLE IN DISSIPATING ANTI-AMERICANISM; (C) THE
CANCELLATION OF THE BYRD VISIT WAS A SHORT TERM VICTORY
FOR THE LEFT WHICH THEY WILL EXPLOIT AT OTHER TIMES IN
OTHER PLACES; (D) DESPITE THE SETBACK, WE SHOULD
CONTINUE TO REMIND THE GREEK GOVT AND THE GREEK
MEDIA OF THE ADVANTAGES OF GREEK-AMERICAN COOPERATION,
INCLUDING ECONOMIC AND MILITARY COOPERATION, AND AS PART OF
THIS PROCESS SHOULD CONTINUE, AS OCCASIONS ARISE, TO REQUEST
PORT VISITS BY US WARSHIPS; AND (E) THE UNDERLYING
CURRENT OF GREEK-AMERICAN RELATIONS IS FAVORABLE AND
WITH SOME SKILLFUL NAVIGATION ON OUR PART SHOULD
CONTINUE TO MOVE US CLOSER TOGETHER.
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